

MAGR
GOVS
MN 2000 MISC-1924

File No. 11
PIN ROOM
UNIVERSITY FARM

1924

(4)

Docking and Castrating Lambs

By

Philip A. Anderson,
Division of Animal Husbandry
Agricultural Experiment Station

1924
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
DOCUMENTS

SEP 21 1976

ST. PAUL CAMPUS LIBRARIES



Published by the University of Minnesota, College of Agriculture, Extension Division, F. W. Peck, Director, and distributed in furtherance of the purposes of the co-operative agricultural extension work provided for in the Act of Congress of May 8, 1914.

DOCKING AND CASTRATING LAMBS

By Philip A. Anderson,
Division of Animal Husbandry,
Agricultural Experiment Station

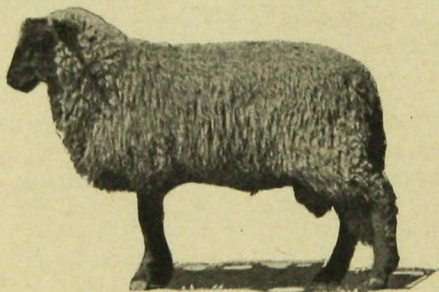
To produce choice lambs three factors are essential: 1. Good breeding; 2. good feeding; 3. castration and docking. The highest grade and price for lambs can be expected only when these practices have been fully employed. At our principal livestock markets too many lambs are arriving the selection of whose parents should have been given more serious thought, especially the sire. Too many arrive in poor condition owing to poor feeding, often to internal parasites, and there are too many ram lambs and those that have not been docked.

Why Dock and Castrate

The market does not want ram lambs, more often spoken of as bucky lambs. They are generally thin and do not make desirable carcasses. The feeder can not use them all, as it seldom pays to feed them. They will not make desirable gains and are a disturbing factor in the fattening pens. The only outlet for these lambs is to the packer at a much reduced price, and he does not want them, as they do not dress out or sell well. If on the other hand these lambs have been castrated and are thin, they may be sold to feeder buyers for one to

two cents a pound less than for top lambs. But as ram lambs the cut is from two to four cents less than top, which on the basis of an 80-pound lamb would be from \$1.60 to \$3.20. Can one afford to lose this extra money?

The ram lamb is generally thin because he is more active or restless. He disturbs the other lambs, especially the ewe lambs, when they should be grazing or resting quietly. The ram lamb invariably lacks finish and is a poor gainer. On the other hand the wether lamb shows more quality and finishes well on the same feed. Experiments have shown that the wether lamb is at least 10 per cent more efficient in making gains in weight under the same conditions.



Ram Lamb Not Docked

The bucky lamb produces an unbalanced carcass, rather strong in development of shoulder and neck, cheap parts of a carcass, while the wether lamb is more evenly balanced and carries a higher degree of finish.

There is a decided difference between the choice market lamb and lower grades that is demonstrated daily on the principal livestock markets. Minnesota native lambs as a whole are not inviting to look at. They are too often bucky in appearance, with long filthy tails, and are not in good market condition.



A Fat Wether Lamb

Why It Pays to Market Fat Lambs

The market requirements for lambs to grade choice are: that they weigh from 75 to 80 pounds, are fat and of good quality. Weight is important. Underweight lambs do not make good lamb carcasses; overweight lambs are not desired by the butcher trade because the cuts they produce are overweight and the consumer purchases other meat in place of lamb. Eastern buyers especially insist upon lambs being fat because their trade demands only good to choice lambs. A fat lamb therefore

has the advantage of greater competition from buyers. The lamb that is thin would lose in flesh during shipment and be marked a grade lower at the final point for slaughter. Quality in a lamb is shown by absence of coarseness throughout; in other words, a smooth appearance in the make-up of the lamb. Coarse lambs do not make attractive carcasses and are therefore discriminated against by the butcher. The retail trade knows too well the kind of lamb carcasses that cut up and sell well. Therefore, in order to receive the high market price for lambs, select good breeding stock, feed well, and castrate and dock. The over-weight, bucky, thin, and coarse appearing lambs are not wanted.

How to Dock Lambs

Docking should be practiced by all sheep breeders, as the tail is of no known value to the sheep. It does not add to the attractiveness—more often the opposite. It is a carrier of filth when the lamb is on pasture, especially on new grasses or forage crops or when a lamb scours badly from stomach worm infestation. It often obstructs or hinders successful breeding in ewes. Moisture collects and it is often the seat of maggot infestation causing the death of the lamb. Packers do not discriminate against undocked lambs, but do not approve of their appearance. It is often hard to keep clean the carcasses from filthy lambs with long tails.

The lambs should be docked when seven to fourteen days old, as the tail is not so purged

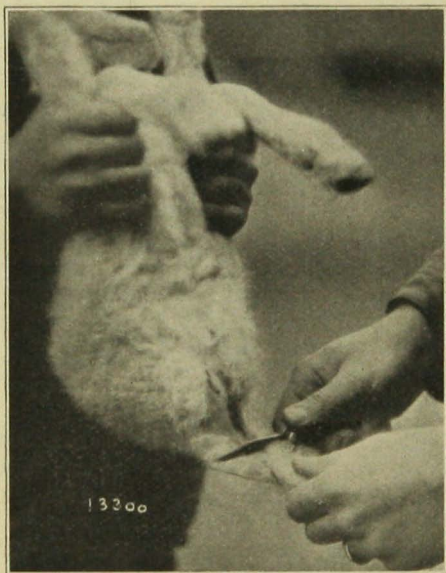
with blood and the operation causes less shock to the lamb. Docking should be done in the morning as a general rule, so that the lambs may be watched during the day for excessive bleeding. Lambs over two weeks old may be successfully docked, but more bleeding should be expected.

Docking and castrating may be done at the same time, but under farm conditions with small flocks, dock first and then castrate. Opinions vary in this regard, but most breeders of purebred sheep allow the ram lambs to grow more before castrating, as lambs change in appearance rather rapidly.

There are many ways of docking, but the two most simple methods are the sharp pocket knife and the hot pincers, as illustrated. Both systems have their merits, but the knife is the most common.

The lambs to be docked should be separated from the rest of the flock so that they can be easily handled with as little disturbance as possible. The operator should have an assistant to hold the lambs with a fore and a hind leg in each hand, with the back of the lamb against his body. The tail is taken off an inch or two inches from the body with a sharp knife. Some prefer to push back as much skin toward the body as possible to assist in covering the stub and bring about rapid healing. No excessive bleeding should result unless the lamb is quite old. In such cases the skin may be tied with a string to stop bleeding, but the string must be

removed the next day. Such lambs should be marked to assist in locating them. A dusting powder of equal parts of boric acid, charcoal, and lime may be used or any good disinfectant.



Docking with Knife

The hot-iron method requires a pair of pincers, a heating device, and a board or stool made with a hole in which the tail can be inserted. This prevents any possible injury to the lamb. The pincers are heated to

a good cherry red color and applied. The operator will soon acquire the necessary speed. If the irons are too hot considerable bleeding may take place as a result of not searing the stub properly. On the other hand if the irons



Docking with Hot Pincers

are too cold the operation is cumbersome. Advocates of this process say that there is less shock to the lamb and no loss of blood if properly done. Western sheep men use a heated iron much like a chisel in the place of pincers or docking irons. The rapidity with which the

wound heals is slower, but the shock is less and bleeding does not occur if the operation is properly performed. The lambs show no ill effect of such an operation and move about as though nothing had occurred.

Do not put off the docking until the lambs are too old. Perform this operation when it is timely and practice cleanliness throughout the operation and place the lambs in as clean quarters as possible.

How to Castrate Lambs

The castration of lambs may not have any undesired bad results if a few precautions are considered beforehand. A few sheep raisers complain of serious losses, but this need not be any more than when castrating calves or pigs. Cleanliness is of first importance. The barn or shed should be clean, the manure removed, and clean straw added. Filthy yards are also carriers of disease germs. Second, select if possible a clear bright day, not too cold. Third, wash hands and knife in an antiseptic—any good coal tar disinfectant or hot water and soap.

The lambs to be castrated should be from 10 to 21 days old. Many prefer to dock and castrate lambs at one operation when the lamb is two weeks old. This is a good plan when a large number are to be handled and a second operation would involve extra labor. This plan has been adopted by western sheep men who have large flocks. For the average farm flock docking should be done from a week to two

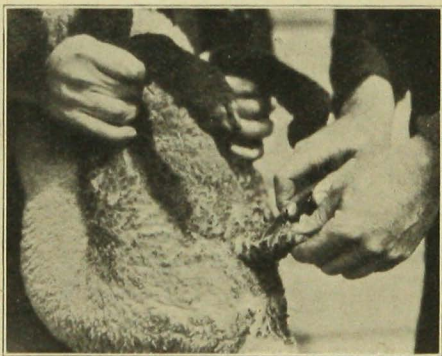
weeks after the lamb is born, then castrate five to seven days later. This seems to cause less shock to the lamb than when both operations are performed at one time. The choice of plan can be left entirely to the man in charge of the flock. Lambs that are older than described can be successfully castrated, but the shock to the lamb is greater and seems to cause some setback. The younger they are the better the results. In some purebred flocks ram lambs are given a little more chance for development, but in grade flocks the owner knows that they are only market lambs. Weak lambs should be given time to gain strength.

The process of castration is simple. An assistant is necessary to hold the lamb with a fore and hind leg in each hand, as shown in illustration, bringing the lamb against his body. The lamb can not struggle and the operator has room to perform the operation rapidly.

The operator assures himself first that both testicles are down. Often one may be retained in the body cavity. In such a case the lamb should be marked and the operation performed later. The scrotum or sac is taken in the left hand and the lower one-third to one-half cut off. This assures proper drainage after the testicles have been removed and assists in the proper healing of the wound.

In removing the testicles two forms of operation may be used, one known as the "covered" operation and the other as the "uncovered." Either may be employed with success tho the uncovered is much more rapid.

In the uncovered operation the testicle is grasped between the thumb and forefinger, the fingers of the left hand are used to hold back or suppress when the testicle is being removed by a straight pull, getting as much of the cord as possible. Do not attempt to remove any more of cord after testicle has been removed, as this will often cause excessive bleeding. With lambs over four weeks old the cord should be directly cut off with the knife after the testicle has been drawn out sufficiently. After testicle has been removed, use some good disinfectant as a precaution.



In the covered operation the thin covering over the testicle is slit through and the operation performed as previously explained. This method is somewhat slower and many times the testicle is crushed and is hard to remove. Take hold of testicle rather high up and this will be overcome.

It is well to keep close watch for a few days over lambs that have been operated on to note any apparent stiffness of hind legs or any sluggishness on the part of the lamb. If some swelling or apparent soreness is present the sac or scrotum should be opened with the fingers to establish drainage again. Some good disinfectant or the above mentioned dusting powder should be used. After drainage has been established again rapid recovery is possible. Many times this infection is caused by unclean quarters or by not taking the proper precautions during castration.



Success is sure where cleanliness has been considered. Lambs on pasture assure added success, owing to the cleanliness of the grass. If castrating is done in late spring and early summer a good fly repellant and healing powder is made of equal parts of powdered boric acid, charcoal, and lime.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



3 1951 D03 471635 L